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## Saudi money aiding terrorist bin Laden

By Jack Kelley, USA TODAY

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WASHINGTON - More than a year after the U.S. Embassy bombings in East Africa, prominent businessmen in Saudi Arabia continue to transfer tens of millions of dollars to bank accounts linked to indicted terrorist Osama bin Laden, senior U.S. intelligence officials told USA TODAY.

The money transfers, which began more than five years ago, have been used to finance several terrorist acts by bin Laden, including the attempted assassination in 1995 of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak in Ethiopia, the officials said.

Secretary of State Madeleine Albright is expected to raise the issue with Prince Sultan, the Saudi defense minister, during his visit to Washington next week. Saudi Arabia, the main U.S. ally in the Persian Gulf, has pledged to fight terrorism.

According to a Saudi government audit acquired by U.S. intelligence, five of Saudi Arabia's top businessmen ordered the National Commercial Bank (NCB), the kingdom's largest, to transfer personal funds, along with \$3 million diverted from a Saudi pension fund, to New York and London banks.

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The money was deposited into the accounts of Islamic charities, including Islamic Relief and Blessed Relief, that serve as fronts for bin Laden.

The businessmen, who are worth more than \$5 billion, are paying bin Laden "protection money" to stave off attacks on their businesses in Saudi Arabia, intelligence officials said. Bin Laden, whose family runs the largest Saudi construction firm, has called for the overthrow of the Saudi government.

The money transfers were discovered in April after the royal family ordered an audit of NCB and its founder and former chairman, Khalid bin Mahfouz, U.S. officials say. Mahfouz is now under "house arrest" at a military hospital in the Saudi city of Taif, intelligence officials said.

His successor, Mohammad Hussein Al-Amoudi, also heads the Capital Trust Bank in New York and London, which U.S. and British officials are investigating for allegedly transferring money to bin Laden. Amoudi's Washington lawyer, Vernon Jordan, could not be reached for comment.

Mahfouz's son, Abdul Rahman Mahfouz, is on the board of Blessed Relief in Sudan. Suspects in the Mubarak attack are linked to the charity.

Bin Laden faces U.S. criminal charges for allegedly masterminding the 1998 bombings of U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania that killed 224 people. Bin Laden, who is in Afghanistan, denies the charges.

Saudi Ambassador Prince Bandar bin Sultan declined to comment on the reports.

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